

# Massachusetts

## Improving Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Choices

### Public Health Problem

Nearly a quarter of all high school students in Massachusetts are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. Through school-based efforts to encourage better nutrition and increased physical activity among younger children, the problem of overweight and the related risk of chronic diseases can be addressed preemptively.

### Taking Action

5-2-1 Go! (eat 5 servings of fruits and vegetables daily, limit screen time to no more than 2 hours a day, and get at least 1 hour of physical activity daily) is a school-based overweight prevention initiative in Massachusetts middle schools that aims to improve eating habits, increase physical activity, and decrease sedentary activities like watching TV - all through changes to core curriculum and existing school policies. The program has two main components that work together to make positive changes in both individual behaviors and organizational decision making. The first component is the School Health Index (SHI), a self-assessment and planning guide developed by CDC that involves teachers, parents, students, and the community in evaluating school policies on health and safety, and guides them in developing a plan to improve them. The second component is Planet Health, a curriculum program developed by the Harvard School of Public Health that weaves important health themes into physical education, language arts, math, science, and social studies.

### Implications and Impact

Based on the positive response to 5-2-1 Go!, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA) is offering a number of schools an enhanced version of its Healthy Choices after-school program, which now uses both the SHI and Planet Health, to improve nutrition and physical activity. Additional regional coordinators and an evaluator have been hired, and BCBSMA has awarded mini-grants to schools to support implementation of these enhancements.

In addition, the results of a recent evaluation of 5-2-1 Go! schools will help better target interventions that promote walking to school as a way to increase physical activity. Another evaluation of schools in the program showed that higher rates of vending machine and fast food restaurant use among students are associated with higher sugar-sweetened beverage consumption. These results can bolster the case for providing students with healthier food choices at school.

### Contact Information

Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Program Coordinator  
250 Washington St., 4th Floor - Boston, MA 02108  
Phone: 617-624-5470 [www.mass.gov/dph/dphhome.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dph/dphhome.htm)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/exemplary>



# Massachusetts

## Women Help Each Other Follow a Healthy Path by Joining Social Support Group

### Public Health Problem

In rural Ware, Massachusetts, women needed help improving their health at a price they could afford. They also needed health advice. The state's Women's Health Network, which offers WISEWOMAN services, created the Women's Health Support Group for network members.

### Taking Action

Each month, women attend group meetings for health tips and help in managing blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol. Meetings also offer hands-on activities such as swapping and tasting recipes and cooking healthy meals. Support group members who have weight problems or high blood pressure, cholesterol, or blood sugar levels are referred to the WISEWOMAN Program, while WISEWOMAN participants who want additional support are also referred to the support group. The support group makes sure that the interests of the participating women drive the group's agenda. Together, WISEWOMAN and the Women's Health Support Group are helping to ensure that underserved women in Ware get the care and support they need to adopt healthy lifestyles.

### Implications and Impact

The Massachusetts Women's Health Support Group is tailored to women's interests and needs and provides women with the tools they need to make healthy changes in their lives. It allows members to be leaders and role models for other women in the community. Many interpersonal benefits have resulted from the Massachusetts Women's Health Support Group. Women are motivated to make healthy changes as they are exposed to other women's success and encouragement. The willingness of members to share and help each other in a peer-led group promotes a setting where women can share. The support group and the Women's Health Network refer women to each other as a way of ensuring that underserved women in Ware can get the care they need to be healthy and fit. Each year, 250 women can be helped through the Women's Health Support Group, which serves Women's Health Network members including WISEWOMAN participants.

### Contact Information

Massachusetts Department of Public Health - WISEWOMAN Project Director  
 250 Washington Street - Boston, MA 02108-4619  
 Phone: (617) 624-6000 [www.mass.gov/dph](http://www.mass.gov/dph)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/exemplary>